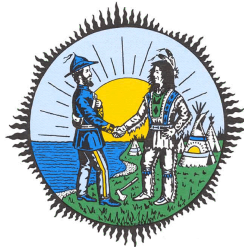




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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 13, 2012

### **MANITOBA GRAND CHIEFS DEMAND RESIGNATION OF MANITOBA'S CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE**

Winnipeg, MB - On June 8, 2012 Manitoba's Children's Advocate, Darlene McDonald, made a number of public criticisms in the media respecting the Inquiry into the Death of Phoenix Sinclair, calling the costs of the Inquiry "wasteful". On June 11, 2012 Ms. McDonald issued a statement clarifying her remarks.

"We are greatly disappointed and concerned that Manitoba's Children's Advocate has chosen to weigh in to the public discussion in such a way. Her office declined the opportunity to seek standing at the Inquiry and now after all this time is criticizing the process and its expense." said AMC Grand Chief Derek Nepinak. He added "It is clear by her statement of clarification that Ms. McDonald has not changed her position. She continues to fail to appreciate that she was appointed to advocate for the children and youth of Manitoba and not for the interests of the Manitoba Government Employees Union or Child and Family Social Workers."

SCO Grand Chief Morris Swan-Shannacappo spurred the call for the resignation of Ms. McDonald during a press conference with the Honourable Jon Gerrard, Leader of the Liberal Party of Manitoba on June 11<sup>th</sup>. "The family of Phoenix Sinclair, as well as the First Nations of Manitoba and the citizens of this province have been patiently waiting for answers as to why this little girl's disappearance went unnoticed for nine months in a system that was supposed to provide care for her. Ms. McDonald's comments undermine the work of the Inquiry. Ms. McDonald has forgotten that she is supposed to be an independent officer advocating for the children. Ms. McDonald seems to be playing the role of "armchair quarterback" in relation to the Inquiry and its mandate. Her callous comments regarding the deaths of children and disrespectful dismissal of the Inquiry simply demonstrate how unsuitable she is to continue as the advocate for our children."

MKO Grand Chief David Harper said, "each of the 30 northern MKO First Nations strongly support the continuation and completion of the Inquiry into the Death of Phoenix Sinclair. As families and communities, we must take every step to make sure that we understand what went wrong leading up to the tragic death of the late Phoenix Sinclair. As leaders, we have to get back on the right track and honour the spirit and intent of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry report to right the wrongs and make things right for the care and protection of our children and of our families." Grand Chief Harper added, "The inquiry into the death of Phoenix Sinclair is an important step towards creating social justice in child welfare."

Liberal Leader Gerrard rose in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly on June 11, 2012 to call on Minister Howard to seek the resignation of Ms. McDonald citing, among other things, her egregious conflict of interest in making such comments. The Minister defended the Children's Advocate and declined to seek her resignation.

The Grand Chiefs of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak and the Southern Chiefs Organization are jointly seeking an immediate meeting Premier Selinger to discuss the Inquiry and to discuss Ms. McDonald's resignation and / or removal from her office and other pressing issues affecting First Nations children in the provincially-controlled child welfare system.

"It is clear that the child welfare system in Manitoba is in dire need of review as it has repeatedly failed our children and families. As leaders we are greatly concerned about the system – who is in charge of it, how it is funded and why we have record numbers of children in care" concluded AMC Grand Chief Nepinak. Grand Chief Harper also concluded stating "Given the inadequacies within the Provincial system itself, it is imperative that we make aggressive efforts for the full restoration of First Nations' jurisdiction over our children, families, and the services to support them, as originally envisioned throughout the AJI-CWI process."

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